



Students' attitudes toward and use of university digital collections

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Keywords: Collections, Digitization, Attitudes, Behavior

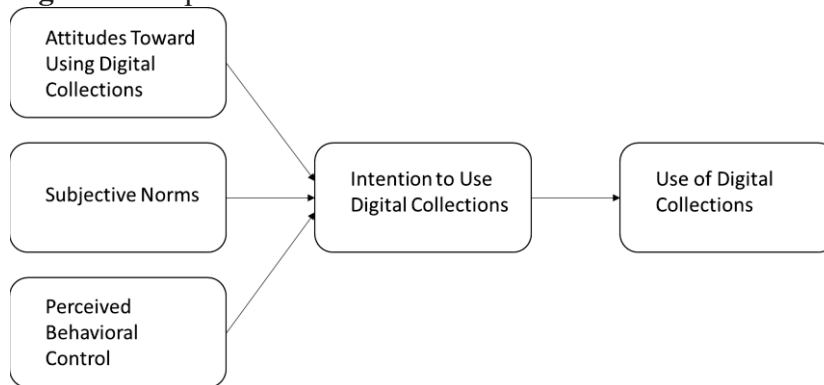
Introduction: University historic costume and textile (HCT) collections are facing pressure to offer digital collections online. As more universities begin to push for open access content, libraries, special collections, and HCT collections are increasingly focused on providing online access to materials. Museums were resistant to new website technology due to their philosophy that real artifacts hold higher esteem than virtual objects; however, museums and other collections are finding that meaningful websites have become essential to fulfilling their educational mission (Saiki, 2010). This proposed research seeks to better understand the attitudes, behaviors, and use of university digital collections and among college students.

Literature Review: Historic costume and textile collections can be found at numerous universities and colleges throughout the United States (Marcketti, Fitzpatrick, Keist, & Kadolph, 2011). Currently, the use of many of these collections is limited to fashion merchandising and design programs due to limited exposure; however, there is an opportunity to expand the impact of these collections through digitization. University HCT collections contribute toward university mission statements by providing a unique educational tool and research opportunity. These collections provide a cross-disciplinary resource which can facilitate collaborative projects for undergraduates, graduates, and faculty (Marcketti et al., 2011).

Previous studies have examined the relationship between the digital museum and the physical museum (Marty, 2007; Pallud & Straub, 2014) as well as the contribution of specific online features such as social networking sites and virtual exhibits (Stewart & Marcketti, 2012). Little has been done, however, to better understand visitors' attitudes toward and intentions to visit digital collections. This information is particularly important to know for university collections since HCT collections are frequently underfunded and understaffed (Marcketti et al., 2011). In order to compensate for reduced staffing and lack of exhibition space, many collections have turned to digitization as a means to expand the contribution of the collection to a wider audience. Unlike a traditional museum, a university's digital collection has the potential to serve as the primary interface with students and community members. Scholars and educators are increasingly turning to digital collections for education and research (Paquin & Barfurth, 2007); therefore, understanding students' attitudes and intentions to visit these sites has become important.

Methodology: The theoretical framework for this study is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). It is important to understand students' attitudes and behaviors regarding the use of digital collections in order to better understand their intentions and actual use of digital HCT collections. The first step of the research will be exploratory in nature through the use of focus groups. These focus groups will take place at two universities to better understand students' attitudes and perceptions regarding digital collections. Following the focus group, a survey instrument will be developed using the TPB model to better predict the attributes necessary to facilitate the use of digital HCT collections.

Figure 1. Proposed Research Model.



Discussion: This research will serve to fill a gap in the literature by focusing on university digital HCT collections as a means to help identify what factors play a role in the use of these digital collections. Understanding the attitudes, subjective norms, and behaviors that contribute toward a student's intention to visit a digital collection's website could help guide future discussions about designing, developing and promoting these digital collections.

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